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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a concise non-technical explanation of the process of classroom developmental assessment, a child-centered, classroom-centered multi-dimensional assessment process designed to help teachers find out as much as possible about individual children so that appropriate educational experiences can be planned for each child. A step-by-step procedure for doing a developmental assessment is outlined. The steps include determining the goals and specific objectives of the program, choosing the best ways of gathering information, gathering the information, using the information to plan the program, reassessing to check the child's progress in the program, and planning again. Special emphasis is given to ways of gathering information, which include using published instruments, locally-developed instruments, systematic observation, parent interviews and questionnaires and samples of the child's work. Also discussed are changing concepts of testing, assessment and evaluation, formative and summative evaluation, normative and criterion referencing, and commentaries and conflicting views on the place of tests, testing and assessment in evaluation. (Author/SB)

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CLASSROOM DEVELOPMENTAL ASSESSMENT -- THE LINK BETWEEN TESTING AND TEACHING

BY

Arna Caplan and Oralie McAfee

Appendix To

DEVELOPMENTAL ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS: SURVEY AND IDENTIFICATION OF HEAD START PRACTICES AND NEEDS

I N T E R I M R E P O R T

July 31, 1977

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"In a forest of parents and children, one needs a map"

Elizabeth Anne Campagna, Director
Alexandria Head Start Center
Alexandria, Virginia

The working paper that follows -- Classroom Developmental Assessment: The Link Between Testing and Teaching -- represents ITC staff efforts to explain in non-technical terms the process of classroom developmental assessment. As the study began, it became evident that there was considerable confusion about developmental assessment at all levels. It was decided that a clarifying statement would be useful to all concerned, particularly practitioners and other local Head Start staff.

This concise explanation merges information from all components of the study: the literature reviews, instrument review, consultant assistance, preparation for and preliminary results of the field study. Particularly helpful were reviews by consultants on the Review Panel, Resource Access Project personnel, people who attended the ITC presentation at the Spring, 1977, OCD Conference in El Paso, and local Head Start staff.

Reviews and suggestions by the following people helped strengthen and refine the paper:

Wendy Abney, Portage Project, Resource Access Project
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CLASSROOM DEVELOPMENTAL ASSESSMENT - THE LINK BETWEEN TESTING AND TEACHING

A new concept of assessment has been showing up more and more often in early childhood education. It is one that focuses on the teacher's need to find out as much as possible about the individual children in the classroom, so that meaningful and appropriate educational experiences can be planned. New instruments are being published that reflect these new ideas. Articles in early childhood education magazines and journals talk about it. Demonstration projects have focused on the role of assessment in early childhood education. Head Start materials recommend this approach be taken.

Even though there are these many indications that new assessment techniques in early childhood education are developing, it is difficult to find one source that tells the teacher how to "do it." Even knowing what to call it is a problem. Terms associated with assessment are substituted for each other and are often used in different ways in different situations. One term that has been used to describe this new concept is developmental assessment, and its common usage is growing. But this has been confusing to some, for in the past developmental assessment has been used in a very different way, referring to the clinical and medical evaluation of children who show signs of problems.

Since adding a new term to an already too long list seems a great disservice, we have decided to solve the problem of "what

to call it" by naming this new approach classroom developmental assessment. The following reasons explain our decision.

A. Classroom developmental assessment is child-centered assessment. It is designed to find out both the strengths and weaknesses of a young child, not just his/her area of deficiency or handicap. It is concerned with the present status of an individual child's abilities in relation to the sequence of development, not just upon his/her standing in relation to other children. It draws on information gathered from a variety of sources in order to gain a thorough understanding of the child.

B. It is a classroom-centered assessment. It is an ongoing classroom procedure that yields information useful to the teacher as he/she plans the program for the class and the individuals in the class. The results are not meant to be stashed away in a folder in a file drawer and forgotten, but to be used on an ongoing basis by the teacher. It is assessment that focuses the teacher's attention on things he/she can expect to deal with in the classroom.

C. It is a multi-dimensional assessment. It recognizes that a child grows in many important ways in the early years. Development in one area is related to his/her development in other areas. It is important not only to look at the child's overall level of development, but at growth in separate key areas as well.

Since it is often helpful to explain an idea by looking at the things it is not, let's look at developmental assessment in this way, by examining some common forms of assessment.

1. Developmental Assessment is not screening. Many times it is helpful to take a quick look at a large number of children in order to find out which ones have problems. Then, these children can be referred for further evaluation. This is the purpose of screening.
2. Developmental Assessment is not diagnostic evaluation. This technique takes an in-depth look at an individual child who has shown signs of having problems. Specialists such as speech and hearing experts, psychologists or doctors are often involved. Decisions about the best program and treatment to help this child are based on the information gained from a diagnostic evaluation.
3. Developmental Assessment is not a year-end assessment. Many programs try to evaluate how effective they have been by assessing the progress the children have made over a year's time.

Ideally, the various forms of assessment work together. Each source provides another piece of the pattern to help adults understand the child. Screening results can give the teacher an overview of the class and identify areas of possible concern. Results of a diagnostic evaluation could be combined with those of a classroom developmental assessment to provide an appropriate program.

At the same time, information gained from a classroom developmental assessment can serve other purposes. The view the teacher has can help a psychologist or other support person better understand the child. Also, the information can be used to report to parents about the child's progress. Information gathered over a year's time might be very useful to the child's next teacher.

While classroom developmental assessment can work with these other methods, and make use of the information collected by them, it is definitely different. It focuses on what the teacher needs to know about children so that the time they spend in the unique setting of his/her classroom is as productive as possible. The teacher needs to know more than who has a problem, or how much last year's class learned. He/she needs to combine this information with the day-to-day indicators that point the way to knowing what experiences are best for each child.

The increase in attention being given to this kind of assessment is not surprising, for it is related to a change in how education is viewed in this country. We are at a point where we are trying to make equal opportunity a reality for children, through identifying, understanding, and meeting their unique needs. In the past, education often served a sorting function, funnelling children into tracks and special programs, where some needs were met, but where opportunities were limited. Today, many educators are attempting to deemphasize classification as a way of looking at children in favor of considering each child as a unique individual.

This changing concept in education is reflected in a number of trends. As centers enroll a more diversified population including minority and handicapped children, it becomes most difficult to provide any one program that will benefit all children. Along with this more diverse population comes an increasing awareness of the need and right of minority groups to be assessed in fair and meaningful ways. Finally, the procedures used in developmental assessment reflect the fact that young children are often more difficult to test than older children and adults. Special techniques are needed to measure and understand their abilities.

What is Classroom Developmental Assessment?

Classroom Developmental Assessment is a way of describing a child's place in the sequence of development and the process of learning in terms of what he knows and can do, so that instructional programs to foster his/her continued development can be planned and implemented. This definition leads to several important considerations. The items and tasks used in developmental assessment must be tied to what we know about how children grow, learn and develop, as well as to what parents and teachers expect them to know.

Knowledge about development comes from several sources:

1. There have been many studies of children which document and describe the progress of children from infancy to adulthood. Two examples of these important bodies of information about children are the Yale Developmental Studies, begun by Arnold Gesell, and the studies of cognitive development by Jean Piaget.

2. There has been a great deal of research that has tried to identify programs, approaches and philosophies that are effective in helping children learn. Head Start Planned Variation is an example of research which produced a great deal of information in this area. But like any study, it does not give all the answers we might want to have when working with young children. By examining the results of many studies, we begin to find clues and suggestions that might prove helpful when planning for children. When repeated evidence appears, we may see the effects in the classroom. As an example, the recent emphasis on motor development in preschool programs stemmed from research which found some links between motor skills and school functioning.
3. Some of our knowledge about young children comes from the close ongoing contact that parents and teachers have with them. The things that are learned from this "daily living" are valuable, and help to form the adult's ideas of what young children can be expected to do.

Since Classroom Developmental Assessment is a tool to help a teacher plan a program, it must be closely tied to the unique goals and objectives of that program. Because of this, it should assess things that teachers are able to teach and help change in a finite period of time. Some aspects of development, such as the child's growing ability to focus his/her eyes on small objects, will probably

not be changed by anything a teacher or program can do. Others, such as his/her ability to be a cooperative member of a group can be enhanced by participation in classroom activities.

Developmental Assessment is concerned with a child's progress as well as where he/she is at any point in time. This implies that he/she will be assessed periodically and that the measures used must be sensitive to change over time. The items in the assessment should be concerned with developmental features that can be expected to change within the period of time the child is in the program, such as language or motor skills.

Children, in the course of development, gain more of certain abilities. They become stronger, increase the size of their vocabularies, and walk a balance beam more steadily. They also use their abilities in different ways. They begin to be able to take others' points of view and realize that objects can belong to several different classes at the same time. Developmental Assessment should include tasks that reveal these new patterns of thinking and behaving as well as the quantity or amount of a child's skills.

What Should Be Assessed?

The nature of classroom developmental assessment helps to determine what kinds of things should be assessed. There are a number of reasons for this:

1. Classroom developmental assessment gathers information not only from instruments but from a variety of sources;

2. What is assessed should be closely related to the general goals and specific objectives of the program;
3. What is assessed should be behavior that can be changed or promoted by the instructional program. It should be something that a teacher can do something about.

But what is included in early childhood assessments is often determined by referring to the large store of existing instruments. Skills and behaviors in areas of development such as physical, motor, perceptual, language, personal and social form the bases for most early childhood assessments. However, classroom developmental assessment attempts to blend information from a variety of sources and tries to be sensitive to the ongoing indicators of status and progress in relation to the program in the center. The teacher should not feel restricted to the common areas of assessment, nor feel he/she must include all of these areas.

How Do You Do A Classroom Developmental Assessment?

Unlike many assessment procedures, there is no set of hard and fast rules for doing a developmental assessment. Rather, there are several steps to complete and within each step the teacher must choose the best way for his/her program. Planning a developmental assessment should be viewed as a dynamic process rather than a static procedure.

The following steps should be included in a developmental assessment:

1. Determine the goals and the specific objectives of the program
2. Choose the best ways of gathering information
3. Gather the information
4. Use the information that has been gathered to plan program
5. Reassess to check the child's progress in the program
6. Plan again

Let's go back and look at each step in depth.

Step One: Determine the goals and specific objectives of the program. Each center should have a mechanism for identifying the general goals and specific objectives for the children in the program. Drawing from staff, parents and specialists, the center should clearly state what it wishes to accomplish during the school year. The teacher should then take a careful look at the goals and objectives identified as important for the children in the program. From this will come a knowledge of the information he/she needs about each child. The question the teacher must ask is, "Where does each child stand in terms of achieving these objectives?" The developmental assessment will help to answer this question.

Step Two: Choose the best way of gathering the needed information. In a sense, a classroom developmental assessment is a systematic way of doing what good teachers have always done -- carefully observing children so that adjustments in their teaching and in the day-to-day program can be made. The developmental assessment process helps the teacher gather this information more systematically, more thoroughly and in a more focused manner. There are a variety of ways it can

be gathered such as using published instruments, locally-developed instruments, systematic observation, parent interviews and questionnaires and samples of the children's work.

1. Published instruments including tests, checklists, and inventories.

   There are an abundance of these being sold today. If a teacher chooses one of them to be part of the developmental assessment, the following should be kept in mind:

   a. The test should be appropriate for the children in the center. The teacher should look at

      1) The age level for which it is designed
      2) The appropriateness of the item content to the culture of the children
      3) The children used for developing the norms
      4) How reliable the test is -- will the results be comparable if the test is given at two different times or by two different people

   b. The instrument should be specific enough to help a teacher learn what a child can do or knows.

   c. The instrument should give information that can be used when planning for children.

   d. The instrument should test things that are part of the program objectives.

   e. The appropriateness of the test should be checked by trying it out with a child or two. This can be seen as "testing the test."

2. Locally-developed instruments.

   Because developmental assessment is tied closely to the goals of a program, local centers may want to develop their own instruments, or adapt published instruments to their own

needs. The same cautions listed above for published instruments also apply to local instruments. Remember, if an existing instrument is modified, the norms for the original test cannot be relied upon. Also locally-developed instruments are more useful if local norms are developed for them.

3. Systematic observation.

Time can be set aside for observing specific program-related behaviors. If a teacher wants to assess a child's progress in social skills, he/she may plan to observe sharing and cooperative skills on the playground for 10 minutes each day. This could be followed up by asking the child whom he would like to swing with or build in the sand with. The combination of the teacher's observations and the child's observations could be more revealing than either alone. To assess the child's cognitive abilities, the teacher could set up a task in a learning center, and observe each child as he/she attempted to complete it. At times, it may be useful to prepare a few questions to ask the child as he works. This can probe his/her thought process in addition to his/her achievements. These child interviews can also be a separate form of assessment.

There are a number of ways of recording what is learned from observations. Anecdotal records can be kept by the teacher, so that especially noteworthy events in the

child's school life can be written down on a regular basis such as once a week, or whenever something interesting and significant happens. Other record-keeping methods include checklists, tape recordings, and progress charts.

4. Parent Interviews and Questionnaires.

Parents see their children in a different setting than teachers, and can add valuable information to a developmental assessment. They can also tell the teacher their expectations for the child -- what they feel is important he/she learn. There are several ways of gathering information from parents. There are a number of published instruments that ask parents to report on the child's development. The most useful of these go beyond medical and family history and ask parents to think about and report on important aspects of child behaviors such as the ability to relate to other children and adults, and the ability to use language effectively.

Talking to parents, either in the home or at the center, can also be useful. If it is difficult for the teacher to do this in the beginning of the year, parents could be given a tape recorder and asked to tape what they feel are the most important things the teacher should know about the child.

An added benefit of including parents in the developmental assessment process is the rapport and good will that is built. Parents can then be involved in planning and teaching, so that the activities of the center can be carried over into the home.

5. Other people.

   Each adult who comes into contact with the child sees him/her in a slightly different way. Parents may be amazed to hear that their rambunctious 3-year old is a docile lamb in preschool. The teacher should seek out observations from the support staff in the center, other teachers, the bus driver, the cook, or any other person who spends time with the child. Each may have something to offer that will help the teacher to better help the child.

6. Samples of the child's work.

   A folder can be kept for samples of a child's work collected on a regular basis, such as drawings, paintings, and dictated materials. This can often be a dramatic way of showing progress.

The goals and objectives of the program will influence the kind of information-gathering tools that are chosen. For example, a program that stresses social-emotional development may want to rely more heavily on anectodal recordings of observation rather than on assessment instruments. A program stressing cognitive development may find several published instruments that are appropriate to the program content.

When selecting the information-gathering methods, teachers may want to choose a packaged program that includes both assessment and curriculum materials. Once the assessment is completed, activities are suggested for meeting the needs of the child. Such a program

should be examined carefully, to see that the objectives stressed are the ones stressed in the classroom and that the package can meet the individual needs of the children.

In either case, a good developmental assessment will include a variety of ways of gathering information. This gives a more complete picture of the child, and helps the reader to become aware of the child's strengths as well as weaknesses.

Using a variety of methods gives the child a better chance to succeed, for it gives a more complete picture of the child. If one method does not reveal his competencies, another might.

Step Three: Gather the information. Since classroom developmental assessment is a means of gathering information that will help teachers in planning, when the information is gathered becomes important. If assessment is put off until January, many good opportunities to individualize program may be missed. If all assessment is done in September, then teachers can not adjust activities to changing needs. Elements of the assessment process should be built in throughout the year, and assessment should be ongoing.

Certain instruments or observation techniques may be difficult to use without special planning. Teachers may want to use parents, college students, or support staff to lend a hand at these times. Often an extra person to help with the daily activities enables one teacher to focus on assessment.

Step Four: Use the information. This new knowledge should be used to plan and implement an individualized program for each child. This program may include special help for particular areas of weakness as well

as specific activities to foster continued development in areas of strength. It may include individual, small group and large group activities.

It is in this step that a crucial blending takes place. This is when the teacher must take the information he/she has systematically collected and combine it with the feelings, intuitions and understandings that come from day-to-day interactions -- "from living with children." All this must be transformed into appropriate activities for the child. An example of how these things must be pieced together may be helpful.

Jennifer loves blocks. She pushes them along the floor in long trains or pretends they are boats on a busy river. Her delight in building towers is only surpassed by her delight in knocking them down. During the first few months of school, her teacher has used several assessment techniques and has found that Jennifer has good control of her large muscles, but shows less satisfactory control of her small muscles. While she is a verbal child, her vocabulary is limited and she lacks an understanding of many spatial and number concepts. Based on the assessment, what seems to be needed is to engage Jennifer in activities such as cutting and pasting, and working puzzles, with language emphasized in all activities. But her teacher realizes that these are the very activities that Jennifer avoids in favor of her rough-and-tumble block play. Attempts to pry her away from the blocks usually result in sullenness and withdrawal. Her teacher senses that the quiet, table-top activities will not help Jennifer. She must find a way to incorporate the things Jennifer

should be learning with what she likes to do. It is this sensitivity, this ability to balance the objective with the intuitive that is at the heart of the classroom developmental assessment process. It is here that the creativity of the good teacher must function so that assessment can be turned into a good program.

Step Five: Reassess to check the child's progress in the program. The early years are a time for rapid change. By periodically assessing the child, developmental progress can be recorded and the new information used to adjust teaching.

Step Six: Plan again. Steps 3, 4, and 5 form a sequence which should be ongoing throughout the school year.

What Are Important Features to Look for When Planning the Classroom Developmental Assessment Process?

The classroom developmental assessment process should provide a way to gather information as objectively as possible. This means that the personal feelings of the teacher should not influence the results, and the teacher's mood or the time of day should not make a difference in the results. If 2 or 3 different people assessed the same child, the results would be very similar. While published instruments may seem to give the most objectivity, methods such as observation can be made more objective by stating clearly what behavior is being looked at under what conditions. By focusing observations and by doing them on a regular basis, much valuable information can be gathered.

Classroom Developmental Assessment should also be sensitive to the culture of the child, to the language of the child, to any handicaps he/she may have, and to his/her special needs because he/she is young. The teacher must get beyond all of these potential difficulties to the true competencies that the child possesses. If he/she cannot fill in the spaces in a paper-and-pencil test because he/she is only 3 and does not have sufficient eye-hand coordination, then the teacher must find other ways of finding out what he/she knows. If the five-year old's math ability seems minimal because his/her English skills are weak, then the language barrier must be broken.

Classroom Developmental Assessment can be viewed as a way of combining the best of three worlds:

The objectivity of instruments.

The ability of human beings to analyze and integrate information from several sources.

The special qualities of teachers of young children that help them view children with warmth, concern, and sensitivity.

A good classroom developmental assessment should combine all these qualities. A good teacher will utilize the information it gives, so that children receive the most relevant and appropriate educational program possible.

ISSUES IN TESTING, ASSESSING, AND EVALUATION

Information on how Head Start teachers and directors assess young children's abilities, and what they perceive as classroom assessment needs in the future, cannot be understood apart from current issues in testing, assessment, and evaluation. A selective review of the literature relating to those issues was done. The review was not exhaustive of this rather large body of writing, some of which is highly technical. Rather, it concentrated on sources that would clarify and illuminate the issues. The information is summarized in this section, under two primary topics:

1. Changing concepts of testing and assessment, and
2. Commentaries on the place of tests, testing and assessment in education.

Both topics are related to a gradually changing concept of education -- from viewing it as a selection process to a focus on the development of the individual (Bloom, Hastings, and Madaus, 1971). Theorists had a different perspective on testing and assessment in this changing educative process than did concerned parents or representatives of minority groups. But all were seeking to make sure that available instruments and procedures served the educational process rather than hindered it.

Changing Concepts of Testing, Assessment, and Evaluation

Changing concepts of testing, assessment, and evaluation seem to fall into two categories: distinctions between the various purposes

of testing, assessment, and evaluation with particular empahsis on the kinds of educational decision-making that results, and the introduction (or reintroduction) of measurement and evaluation constructs to meet "new needs for educational evaluation, new conditions that must be met, new knowledge about education, and new technologies that can be utilized" (Tyler, 1969, p. 1). Each of these will be discussed in turn.

Distinctions between the several purposes for which programs test or assess were made for both individuals and for program units, such as classrooms, courses of study, or a particular educational approach (Bradley & Caldwell, 1974; Cronbach, 1970; Bloom, Hastings & Madaus, 1971; Carver, 1970; Evans, 1974; and Tyler, and Wolf, 1974).

According to Bradley and Caldwell (1974), there are (1) formative and summative decisions in program planning and evaluation; (2) screening; (3) diagnosis and (4) administrative decisions. Formative evaluation in program planning serves to monitor a child's progress in a given program and to check for errors in the program. Summative evaluation is concerned with level of mastery or attainment at the end of a total instructional period. Screening results in a selection decision: is further testing and possible treatment indicated, or is it not? Diagnostic testing and assessment helps determine the type of treatment needed. Administrative decisions are not as much concerned with individual children as with system-wide or program-wide information.

Cronbach (1970) classified the decisions that tests help people make as the selection and classification of individuals, evaluation of educational or treatment procedures, and acceptance or rejection of scientific hypotheses. He further differentiated between selection and classification: "selection means accepting some and rejecting others; classification determines which of several possible assignments or treatments a person shall receive" (1970, p. 23).

Evaluation was seen as a way of gathering evidence to improve learning and teaching, an aid in clarifying program goals and objectives and students' progress toward them, and a means of following an individual's progress in the teaching-learning process, so that program changes can be made if necessary (Bloom, Hastings, & Madaus, 1971).

As testing, assessment, and evaluation were expanded beyond the more typical functions of selecting, grading, and classifying students, new constructs were introduced and old ones revived. Those constructs included formative and summative evaluation, criterion and content referencing, ecological and naturalistic studies, and an increasing awareness of the relationship of research findings to social policy (Weinberg and Moore, 1974).

The essence of this change was summarized by Tyler.

> Tests were originally constructed to serve in the sorting and selection of individuals. Now, they are to be used to help the individual in his efforts to learn...." (1974, p. 170).

Two of these constructs -- the distinction between formative and summative evaluation and between normative and criterion referencing -- are particularly relevant to classroom developmental assessment.

Formative and Summative Evaluation

Formative evaluation takes place during the teaching-learning process so that content and procedures can be changed if students are not learning. Summative evaluation takes place at the end of a unit, course of study, or a year (Scriven, 1967). Related to this concept of formative evaluation of curriculum is a change from student assessment for grading, comparing with other students or some normative standard to one of ascertaining what a pupil can or cannot do so that appropriate instruction can be planned (Tyler, 1969; Bloom, Hastings, & Madaus, 1971; Stodolsky, 1975).

Both these concepts of formative evaluation provide information about the efficacy of the teaching-learning process. One approaches the instructional decisions from the viewpoint of program-planning and evaluation as they lead to curriculum development and revision; the other from the viewpoint of the individual pupils and needed information about their learning and growth.

Developmental assessments in this context are for formative evaluation; for what Bradley and Caldwell say is to "monitor the child's progression in the program and to check for errors in the program" (1974, p. 4.).

Instruments and procedures designed to serve other evaluative purposes -- selection, classification, or summative evaluation of a total program -- are seldom appropriate for measuring individual status and change over time.

Item-selection and referencing are designed to reflect individual differences and may not accurately or validly measure changes within individuals. Also, the importance of a difference or change within an individual cannot be determined by statistical significance (Carver, 1970; Stodolsky, 1975; Glaser & Nitko, 1971). The distinction between criterion-referenced tests and normative-referenced tests is related to these psychometric difficulties of traditional measures used for formative evaluation.

Normative and Criterion Referencing

Although the difference between a criterion-referenced measure and a norm-referenced measure is sometimes not readily apparent, the following distinctions can be made:

- Norm referenced measures are used to determine an individual's performance relative to the performance of others on the same measure. The meaningfulness of the score emerges from the comparison with the normative group.
- Criterion referenced measures are used to determine an individual's status in relation to some criterion or performance standard rather than to other individuals. They are designed to yield measurements directly interpretable in relation to specified performance standards, either from the content itself (content referencing) or some external criterion.
- Norm-referenced measures are designed to emphasize variability among individuals and are well suited to selectivity.

Criterion referenced measures might be considered absolute measures, because it is possible that all learners could achieve the desired criterion (Popham and Hosek, 1972; Glaser & Nitko, 1971; APA, 1974).

Criterion referencing tells what a person is able to do and is useful in judging that person as an individual. Normative referencing tells how a person compares with others and is useful in judging that person's ability to compete (Cronbach, 1970).

These basic distinctions have many implications for the technical aspects of instrument construction and technical quality, including variability, item construction, reliability, validity, item analysis, reporting, and interpretation (Popham and Hosek, 1969).

The relationship of normative referencing and criterion referencing is not always clear. For example, several of the classroom developmental assessment instruments currently in use are regarded as criterion-referenced, yet the items and their placement in the developmental framework are taken from the Bayley and Gesell scales, the Denver Developmental Screening Test, and other normed scales.

Commentaries and Conflicting Views on Tests, Testing, and Assessment

The place of tests, testing, and assessment in an educational process committed to the education of all students has received different kind of consideration from critics and advocates than from theorists. Evidence of this interest, which ranges from lively to impassioned, can be found in the position papers of national organizations, articles in both popular and professional journals, recently published books on the subject, and the publicity given related court rulings.

Criticisms of tests include their suspected political nature, the whole concept of selecting and classifying human beings, the notion of "IQ," the misuses of testing and assessment results, the dominant culture orientation of items, lack of recognition of language differences, inappropriateness of items to children's backgrounds, ambiguity of items, context of assessment, the effect of the test situation, test apprehension, norming populations used, and treating as "facts" data obtained by assessing complex human behavior with relatively crude instruments (Mercer, 1974; Williams, 1972; McClelland, 1976; Hobbs, 1975; Evans, 1974; Block, 1976; Messick & Anderson, 1974; Rand Corporation; 1974; and others).

Although most of the controversy concerns "standardized tests," "IQ tests" and the use and misuse of these, it is not confined to them. Achievement tests, aptitude tests, and readiness tests are included, and it can be predicted that any systematic procedure for making educational decisions, including classroom developmental

assessment, will be also. A Federal-court jury ruled that a child's constitutional rights had been violated because results of a screening test had been instrumental in identifying a lack of developmental readiness, and in denying him admission to kindergarten and first grade (Newsweek, January 10, 1977, p. 44).

In fact, the 1974 revision of the American Psychological Association's Standard for Educational and Psychological Tests extended APA guidelines to both test developers and test users, and to "any assessment procedure, assessment device, or assessment aid; that is, to any systematic basis for making inferences about people" (p. 2).

The most vocal objections to tests and testing has come from minority group representatives, including Blacks, Native American Indians, and Chicanos, but criticisms are also likely to come from any bilingual/bicultural group; from organizations representing psychological and measurement specialists, educators and administrators; from people and organizations that have a humanistic, personalized, philosophy about goals and methods of education; from the courts; from groups concerned with children's rights, and from teachers and parents of young children.

Position papers on standardized testing, assessment, and evaluation have been issued by a number of national organizations. These organizations include the Association of Black Psychologists (1969, 1976), Association of Psychologists of La Raza (1976), American Personnel and Guidance Association (1976), Association

for Childhood Education International (Perrone, 1976), National Association of Elementary School Principals (Perrone, 1976), and the National Education Association (1973). Their recommendations range from a request for government intervention and legal sanction against existing testing practices, to a moratorium on standardized testing, to urging reconsideration of the uses of standardized tests.

Humanistic psychologists and educators questioned the relatively narrow set of learnings measured by the vast majority of assessment instruments; the effect on educational goals, curriculum, and teaching the standardizing and convergent effect that such procedures may have; the tendency to accept without question the well-stated behavioral objective; the tendency to measure simple, testable tasks instead of higher-level thought processes, and product as opposed to process (Perrone, 1976; Glass, 1970; Combs, 1972; Bussis, Chittenden and Armarel, 1975).

Teachers and researchers working directly with little children voiced additional concerns. Many children, especially those from low-income or minority groups, are uneasy when put in a one-to-one situation with a strange adult or when directly questioned (Cazden, 1971). Children quickly become bored and do less than their best on a dull task, on one they do not fully comprehend, or if they have been "over-tested" (Sigel, 1974). Some of the criticisms minority groups have of testing and assessment have also been noted by early childhood educators; items may be ambiguous or inappropriate, particularly to children of diverse cultures; response modes may be inappropriate; the test situation, itself, may have a reactive effect

that influences the reliability of results, and so forth (Sigel, 1974; Cazden, 1972; Mackler & Holman, 1976). Validity and reliability particularly in the affective domain, are suspect and "verbal overloading" may be a problem (Walker, 1973).

The rights of children and parents provide another perspective on the use and misuse of information gathering through assessment procedures. Through the Buckley-Pell Amendment, General Education Provisions Act of 1974 and the HEW guidelines related to it, parents and children were guaranteed access to records and procedures, confidentiality of results, and safeguards relating to decisions following assessment. These guidelines have implications for classroom assessment procedures as well (Chase, 1976).

Parents have been distressed by what they consider unfair selection, classification, and placement of their children and have turned to the courts for definitive rulings concerning certain practices relating to tests and placement based on the results (Diana vs. California State Board of Education, Hobson vs. Hanson).

Mercer asserted that psychological assessment procedures were a civil rights issue because

> present assessment and educational practices violate at least five rights of children: a) their right to be evaluated within a culturally appropriate normative framework; b) their right to be assessed as multi-dimensional, many-faceted human beings; c) their right to be fully educated; d) their right to be free of stigmatizing labels; and e) their right to cultural identity and respect (1974, p. 132).

However, even the most vigorous opponents of standardized tests affirm that "we do not oppose evaluation; we consider it basic to the growth of programs, teachers, and children..." (Perrone, 1976). Rather,

better instruments, procedures, and practices should be utilized, including multiphasic assessment, culture-fair instruments, culturally-based instruments, criterion referencing, Piagetian clinical assessments, better theory and better training to overcome existing problems (Popham and Hosek, 1969; DeAvila and Havassy, 1975; McClelland, 1976).

Other psychologists and educators defended testing and assessment.

Messick and Anderson (1974) pointed out that two questions were involved: (1) is the test adequate for the purposes? and (2) should the test be used? The first question is scientific and can be answered by appraising the test's psychometric properties, especially construct validity. The second question is ethical and can only be answered in terms of human values.

Tests and testing cannot be blamed for inappropriate uses, misinterpretation of results and misuses of results (Messick and Anderson, 1974; APA, 1974; Cronbach, 1970; Evans, 1974). Other assessment procedures have other drawbacks and are also subject to misuse.

Yet there seems to be agreement that some type of assessment or appraisal is essential for program planning and to chart children's progress (Evans, 1974; Almy, 1975). The Head Start Program Performance Standards state that provision must be made

> for ongoing observation, recording, and evaluation of each child's growth and development for the purpose of planning activities to suit individual needs (Office of Child Development, 1975, p. 10).

The educator attempting to plan and implement an appropriate educational program faces a very real problem -- one that brings national issues

concerning testing, assessment and evaluation into the classroom. The importance of these issues to education as a whole; to the persistent social problems that plague our country; to the interrelationship of our legislative, judicial, and educational institutions; and to the continuing debate over purposes and processes of education can hardly be overstated. Their importance to assessment practices in early childhood education cannot be overlooked.